

MEMO

DATE: October 10, 2005
TO: Regional Council
FROM: Mark Pisano
SUBJECT: Global Gateway Regions Discussion

SUMMARY:

At the 4th Annual National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) meeting of the Major Metros, on September 10, 2005, Mark Pisano and Gary Gallegos (SANDAG) made a presentation of the Southwest Mega-region. Currently defined as the area between Kern County and Baja California, the case study is the result of collaboration between Kern COG, SCAG, SANDAG and Baja California (through the Southwest Compact). An accompanying report was also distributed, which outlines the trends and strategies of this emerging Global Gateway Region.

The case study is part of the national Third Century Strategy effort, which calls for the creation of case studies by each of the nine Global Gateway Regions in the United States. Ordinarily these case studies are conducted by universities within the mega-regions. However, interest among the MPOs in the Southwest Mega-region was such that a more effective and significant report was produced through their collaboration. Meetings with Kern, SANDAG and Baja California have occurred to move this effort forward and fine-tune the final joint product.

The next step of this effort is to use the national strategy document, and supporting case study reports, such as the Southwest Mega-region, to convene a White House Conference on the topic. With White House support for the coordination of Federal agencies at the mega-regional scale, and the development of strategies geared towards the long-term growth and competitiveness of these areas, the SCAG region and other Global Gateways will be able to accommodate growth and maintain their livability and prosperity into the future.

BACKGROUND:

America's Third Century Strategy was first raised at the annual NARC meeting in 2003. Subsequent discussions, conferences abroad in Europe and Asia, and research work at the University of Pennsylvania led to an understanding of Global Gateway Regions: large networks of metropolitan areas, each spreading over thousands of square miles, which serve as the economic engines and innovation centers of their respective world regions.

By 2050, the U.S. population is expected to grow by 40% to 430 million people, while 70% of this population and 80% of all economic growth is projected to reside within the nation's nine emerging Global Gateway Regions. If this growth is to be accommodated based on current trends, the nation will need to build half-again as much housing, commercial development and infrastructure as during the past two centuries, and would consume four times as much land by 2050 as in its history. The question is thus: how can these regions sustain this growth and maintain competitiveness in the global economy, while approaching build-out in land use and infrastructure, and contending with congestion, environmental degradation, and increasing socio-economic inequity?

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The future of the nation and its global competitiveness depend on the livability and sustainability of these mega-regions, and on their connection to the vast under-performing rural areas in country's heartland. Large-scale efforts based on coordinated land use and transportation strategies are imperative as the United States charts the course for its third century.

Already, Europe and Pacific Asia are initiating mega-regional strategies for cohesion and competitiveness through intra-regional and intra-national infrastructure investments. Similar large-scale strategies must be pursued in the United States that focus on reversing current trends to develop more efficient urban forms; infrastructure systems that have the needed resiliency, redundancy and capacity for growth and national security; and the infrastructural and educational foundations for economic growth and opportunity.

National efforts have strong historic precedents in the United States. In 1807 and 1907, Presidents Jefferson and Roosevelt respectively instituted national plans to stimulate major infrastructure, conservation and regional economic strategies that powered America's economic growth and success in its first two centuries. A bold new strategy is needed as the nation enters its third century, with 2007 as an ideal time to initiate this effort.

The mega-region requires a new and improved framework for cooperative governance and financing. As in the past, the President may promote this vision and lead efforts to coordinate federal agencies towards policies at the mega-regional scale. State, regional and local officials, as well as coordinating groups, foundations, and universities could work to shape these policies.

Using a basic Return on Investment structure, both public and private investments must focus on efficient networks that increase productivity, while generating affordable outcomes in housing and transportation. A goal-oriented, performance-based decision process that supports this objective is integral, while government policies and tax structures reinforce this approach.